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ABSTRACT

In the fall of 1977 a four year project was initiated to assist a group of Micmac and Maliseet Indians to earn the Bachelor of Education degree and become eligible for teacher certification. The 41 participants were teacher's aides who wished to be upgraded to classroom teachers. To allow students to maintain their full time jobs, an on-campus, off-campus format was developed. During each of the two regular terms students attended two three week on-campus sessions, each of which was followed by a five week off-campus session. New material was introduced by course instructors during the on-campus sessions while the period away allowed time for special projects, group tutorial sessions, follow up work, etc. Roughly equivalent academic standards and course content were maintained; common assignments and tests were given whenever practical. During the six week summer session the Indian students were integrated with the general student population in arts/education courses. By September, 1978, nine students had withdrawn from the program, only one of which was forced to leave because of low academic standing. Even though less than half of the Indian students had completed high school, their mean cumulative grade point average was slightly higher than that of the regular education program. This progress report on the first year of the program's operation concludes with a number of recommendations for persons establishing similar programs. (Author/DS)

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The Indian Students B.Ed. Program- How the University of New Brunswick Responded to the Needs of the Indian Community

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Abstract

In the fall of 1977 the Faculty of Education of the University of New Brunswick began a four-year project to train Indian teachers. Graduates of the program will receive the Bachelor of Education (Elementary) degree and will be eligible for certification by the New Brunswick Department of Education. The purpose of this paper is to describe how the University developed the program in response to the expressed needs of the Indian community.

Included in the paper is a discussion of the problems encountered in designing a program that satisfied the academic requirements of the university, the needs of the students, and certification requirements of the Department of Education. The resulting program is made up of both on-campus and off-campus sessions to allow students employed as teacher-aides and counsellors to maintain their jobs. Each term has two three-week on-campus sessions, each of which is followed by a five-week off-campus session. During the on-campus sessions students receive leaves of absence from their jobs so that they can devote full time to lectures and studying. When students are back at home, the faculty travel to the reserves and hold small group tutorial sessions in the late afternoon. In addition, students attend the regular U.N.B. Summer Session during July and August.

The paper is concluded with a report on the progress of the first year of operation of the program; also a number of recommendations are given which may prove useful to persons establishing similar programs.

Indian children in New Brunswick, whether attending provincial or federal schools, have long experienced difficulties in coping with the educational system. The publication of the policy paper Indian Control of Indian Education by the National Indian Brotherhood (1972), together with the establishment of Indian teacher training programs in Western Canada such as IMPACTE, NITEP, and ITEP highlighted the desirability and necessity of training Indian teachers in New Brunswick.

In the fall of 1977, the Faculty of Education of the University of New Brunswick began a four-year project to train a group of Micmac and Maliseet Indians to become teachers. Graduates of the program will receive the Bachelor of Education (Elementary) degree and will be eligible for certification by the New Brunswick Department of Education. The purpose of this paper is to describe how the University developed this program in response to the expressed needs of the Indian community.

The Need

The need for an Indian teacher education program centered around the desire of Indian teacher aides to be up-graded to classroom teachers and concern of Indian people about the quality of education.

The first Indian teacher aides began to be hired in federal schools in New Brunswick in the late sixties and early seventies. Their role was to assist the regular non-Indian

classroom teacher in matters related to culture and language. Teacher aides in many cases were not high school graduates and had little or no training to work in the classroom. The Department of Indian Affairs sponsored special training courses from time to time for teacher aides, however a measure of frustration developed as a result of them. Teacher aides were expected to attend these courses, yet no official credit towards a certificate or degree was granted by teacher training colleges or universities. In essence, the teacher aides felt victims of a system in which they were relegated to the role of teacher aide despite the fact that only several Indian teachers were employed in New Brunswick.

In addition to the concern of the teacher aides, there was a general feeling among Indian people in New Brunswick that the quality of education their children were receiving was inadequate when compared to non-Indians. Evidence of this was the high drop-out rate among Indian children. A partial solution to the problem, many Indian people felt, was to train Indian teachers who would then be sensitive to the needs and problems of their children.

The concerns about certification and quality of education were formally expressed to the University of New Brunswick Faculty of Education by Mr. Stewart Paul, consultant in Indian Education for the New Brunswick Department of Education, in March, 1976. At this point, planning for a Bachelor of

Education program for Indian students was initiated.

Development of the Program

A university committee was brought together shortly afterwards to deal with curriculum, funding and administration of the proposed program. Members of this committee included persons from the Department of Indian Affairs, the Department of Education, the Union of New Brunswick Indians and the Faculty of Education. This body later became the formal advisory committee for the program. By May, 1976, the committee had produced a working paper calling for a four-year B.Ed. program for Indian teacher aides. The paper suggested that the basic curriculum of the proposed program be only slightly modified from what is established for the regular program offered by the Faculty, that the format of presentation of the courses be substantially modified to allow teacher aides to maintain their jobs and study at the same time, that special probationary admission provisions be granted and that cooperation among the University, the Department of Indian Affairs and the Department of Education was essential.

During the fall of 1976 a number of crucial steps took place in the development of the program. The Department of Indian Affairs committed funding for the first year of operation; the Senate Curriculum Committee approved the outline of the program of studies and special admission criteria; the Senate Advisory Committee recommended acceptance of the program; and

the Advisory Committee on Teacher Licensing and Certification of the Minister of Education recognized the program to be fully equivalent to the regular B.Ed. program offered by U.N.B. At the same time several committee members and an Indian Affairs representative made a study tour to four universities in Western Canada involved in teacher education for Indian students. Their report (Gould, Hamilton, Paul and Peters, 1977) offered invaluable assistance in planning details of the U.N.B. program.

Final approval of the program came from the Board of Governors of the University of New Brunswick in January, 1977. Since the program was essentially a modified form of the already existing B.Ed. program at U.N.B. formal approval by the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission was not necessary. Having obtained all necessary approvals, the program advisory committee then turned its attention to matters related to staffing, facilities, recruitment of students and final curriculum details.

The Model

The program, as implemented September 1977, follows an on-campus, off-campus format. The model is summarized below:

Term 1 (12 credit hours - education courses)

3 weeks on-campus
5 weeks off-campus
3 weeks on-campus
5 weeks off-campus

Term 2 (12 credit hours - education courses)
same as above

Summer Session (12 credit hours - arts/education courses)
6 weeks on-campus

This cycle is repeated each of the four years of the program, except that the fourth summer session will not be necessary as students will have accumulated the 120 credit hours necessary for graduation by the end of the second term of the fourth year.

The on-campus, off-campus format of the model allows students to maintain their full-time jobs in the school system. To attend the three-week on-campus sessions, students obtain leaves of absence from their employers. The off-campus classes are normally given in schools on reserves where the teacher aides are employed. New material is usually introduced by the course instructors during the on-campus sessions, while the off-campus sessions allow time for follow-up work, projects, testing and remediation.

Two faculty members were hired for the first two years of the project. Their responsibilities are the teaching of mathematics education, foundations, language arts, and reading courses. One of the faculty members (the author) was named program coordinator, responsible for administration and advising students. Two full-time tutors with specialties in mathematics and language arts were also hired. Each tutor is responsible for auditing particular courses for the

purpose of helping students who may have difficulties with a course. From time to time other faculty are engaged to teach courses outside the specialties of the program faculty.

Evaluation of First Year of Operation

An external evaluator was contracted at the beginning of the project to provide an annual report as well as to give on-going feedback to the Advisory Committee and program coordinator. The first report (Loree, 1978) provides a written record of the development of the program and an assessment of the first year of operation, together with recommendations for subsequent years. Space limitations prevent a comprehensive discussion of all the recommendations of the report and observations made during the first year, however several pertinent ones should be mentioned.

First, there was no evidence to suggest that the students in this program were any less motivated or less able to handle academic work than students in the regular B.Ed. program. In fact, the mean cumulative grade point average of the Indian students was slightly higher than that of the regular program. Although this finding must be interpreted cautiously because of the number of variables involved, it provides some indication of the students' motivation to succeed. Thirty-eight students initially enrolled in the program, three were admitted later in the academic year, and by September, 1978, nine students had withdrawn. Of the nine who withdrew,

only one was forced to leave because of low academic standing. This again attests to the determination of the students, especially when it is considered that less than half of the total group had completed high school.

Second, despite the fact that students were taught in discrete sections and a modified version of the regular program format was used, roughly equivalent academic standards and course content could be maintained. This was accomplished through hiring faculty fully qualified to teach their respective courses. Also, the faculty frequently consulted with other regular faculty members teaching the same courses, whenever practical, common assignments and tests were given. During the summer session the Indian students were integrated with the general student population in courses given by the Faculty of Arts. These courses also provided evidence to refute any criticisms of "overly-liberal" grading.

One further observation, more general in nature, is that, given the will and determination, universities can be responsive to the educational needs of society. This is evidenced in the relatively short time (less than two years) that the University of New Brunswick, with the cooperation of outside organizations, was able to establish the Indian students program.

Recommendations

On the basis of the U.N.B. experience, the following

recommendations are offered to persons planning similar programs:

1. Most important is that Indian people perceive the need for a special program. Preferably this need should be articulated before the university becomes involved in the project.

2. Indian people must be involved in the early planning stages of the project. This involvement must be active as opposed to only token involvement. While this recommendation sounds easy to adopt,in practice the university faculty may find it difficult to accept outside opinions on academic related matters expressed by persons often less academically qualified than themselves.

3. Every attempt must be made to ensure that courses intended for Indian students not be "watered-down" versions of those offered to others. The university should engage an external evaluator for this as well as other reasons. Often criticism may come from the least expected sources - other Indian students.

4. Special names or labels for the program should be avoided. At the same time, the program should be conducted with little publicity, at least until it is firmly established.

5. To maintain credibility, the program should lead to provincial licensing and certification even though most of the students may not plan to teach in provincial schools.

6. If Indian faculty cannot be found, the program staff should be particularly sensitive to the needs of minority people. Preferably this sensitivity should be combined with experience working with Indian people. Furthermore, compromises on the academic qualifications of the staff should not be made.

In conclusion, it is hoped that this paper will stimulate discussion on ways in which universities can better meet the educational needs of Indian people.

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